

Media Ownership

I am writing to comment on Docket No. 02-277, The Biennial Review of the FCC's broadcast media ownership rules.

You are probably getting a lot of mail with the same type of remarks because of templates provided for people like me to comment on this issue. I support all those comments, but I would rather include a few of my own.

I have been involved in radio since I was 14 years old. I received my Third Class Radiotelephone Operator's license in October 1955, and have been a part-time announcer on at least seven different radio stations and two television stations throughout my life before, during, and after my 22 years as an officer in the United States Air Force (including two combat tours in Vietnam, and combat flight-crew duty stateside as a B-52 navigator-bombardier and in West Germany as an F-4 weapon systems operator). I have been involved in both commercial and non-commercial (public) broadcasting during that time.

From the beginning of my time in radio I was told, and everything I read indicated, that the airwaves of this country belong to the public and are controlled by our government in the public interest; and that those who are licensed to broadcast are required by law to serve the public interest first.

As a conservative, I strongly believe in private enterprise which is not hampered by massive government restraint and is not only allowed, but encouraged, to engage in normal competition.

Unfortunately, in recent years the deregulation which has helped many business entities to engage in the kind of competition which results in better products and services has also allowed a few media giants to buy and control a very large portion of the airwaves of this country.

From a business standpoint they are doing what any good business must do to succeed--providing products consumed by a large number of people and returning huge profits to the firms and their stockholders.

There are several problems I see. The first is that broadcast entities have a totally unique effect on their consumers. No other product I can think of affects behavior, taste, choices, and the overall human psyche the way broadcasting does. Broadcast products are absorbed directly into our brains through our eyes and ears. Other products are not. I believe this is why those who established the original restrictions on the broadcast industry did so.

Another problem with broadcast deregulation is there is less and less control from the FCC in the area of good taste and community norms for behavior and language. Today the language and situations on all of our broadcast outlets are becoming more crude, suggestive, and graphic. I am not a prude, but there is a time and place for everything.

Given that the deregulation we have had up to now has allowed the deterioration we have already experienced, then we can only expect further deregulation to result in further deterioration to the point that we will eventually have full frontal nudity, sexual acts, and the worst imaginable language at all hours as fewer and fewer media conglomerates vie for whatever revenue remains.

My next concern is the availability of free expression of ideas and political choices. Because of the way this country has evolved in terms of what influences our opinions and our votes, the broadcast entities exercise, by a huge margin, the preponderance of influence over what we know and therefore what leads us to the choices we make. This is not normal "business" which should be further deregulated in the name of competition.

The fewer media owners, the greater the likelihood they may decide not to challenge some future effort to silence a particular political entity. Let's say there is a majority of one party in both houses of the Congress, the President is of the same party, and the Supreme Court has a majority known to lean in the same direction. What is to prevent that party, through all three branches of government, from establishing rules for who can and can't engage in political speech, then threaten to restrict those few media owners in a manner that would affect their bottom line, to the point that they simply capitulate. This could threaten our entire way of life and the freedoms our founding fathers worked so hard to create, and so many have sacrificed (including their lives) to protect and defend.

This scenario is far more likely with a small number of owners than it is with a wide diversity of ownership where there would be many more voices of dissent.

Finally, what about Taft-Hartley? Have we forgotten about our restrictions on monopoly? Are we going to damage the system of broadcast ownership that has worked so well then turn right around and go through the upheaval of Taft-Hartley hearings and lawsuits? Let's avoid that now while we can. Even Bell Telephone, the friendliest of friendly giants, was broken up to allow for more competition. Why are you the FCC, and you the Congress, moving toward restriction of competition in one of the most lucrative, and absolutely the most influential, entities of our society?

We all realize the competition brought to bear by the cable industry on the traditional broadcast industry, but removing the restrictions that have worked so well for the life of the broadcast industry, with the certainly destructive results it will bring, is not the way to handle these developments.

Please curb your haste to deal with this. There is nothing driving the sudden desire to make these decisions except the pressure exerted by those who want to push through a hurried decision before the public has a chance to make its voice heard.

Thank you for your consideration and patience,

William Lloyd Bryant
4351 Appleton Place
Kettering, OH 45440-1237